

Rearing of the Clerid Beetle *Opilo mollis* L.

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For several years past I have beaten from an old hedgerow in this vicinity specimens of this rare beetle, usually securing two or three each year. The optimum emergence period from these admittedly limited data would appear to be the three weeks from the last week in May to the middle of June.

Last year, having secured both a male and a female on the same day, I thought I would attempt to breed the species, and accordingly put them together in a glass container with a piece of dead wood; they promptly (and briefly) mated, after which the male showed no interest in the female whatever. Both beetles were then put in a very large cage with several pieces of long-dead Whitethorne (*Crataegus oxyacanthus*), comparatively undecayed portions containing the larvae of *Anobium fulvicorne* St. being selected on the even chance that this species is the host of *Opilo mollis* in this locality. Both disappeared altogether, but the female was found dead on the floor of the cage after a fortnight. Presumably the dead male was eaten by woodlice, which could not be excluded altogether.

On three occasions from August to November samples of the wood (which was kept outdoors and subject to weather) were split to pieces in fruitless attempts to discover progeny. No larvae other than those of *Anobium fulvicorne* were found, and so the project was considered a failure. However in June of this year, needing the cage, I took out the wood and before discarding it split a portion, thereby discovering a large larva, which had prepared a pupal chamber in a very hard dry part. This larva, which was later to produce an adult *Opilo mollis*, was superficially similar to that of *Thanasimus*. The skin was whitish and covered with a regular pattern of pink tubercles on the upper surface of each segment. The head was small, dark, and spatulate, the body hirsute and slightly swollen posteriorly. The larva was active and very mobile, clinging tenaciously to any rough surface with its well-developed thoracic legs.

Later the passage of the larva was traced back from the pupal chamber for about two inches, to an old exit-hole of *Anobium*. It had enlarged the boring considerably, evidently consuming both the contents and some of the surrounding very hard wood, since the passage was now filled with large particles of excreta. The larva evidently therefore possesses the dual capability of free-ranging and woodboring. Several similar enlarged borings were found, showing that a considerable distance in the wood had been traversed, and it seems unlikely that sufficient *Anobium* larvae could have been encountered to feed the larva to its full size. Probably, therefore, at least part of the nourishment is provided by the gallery contents, namely the excreta of the original inhabitants, and perhaps the wood from the enlarging operation.

The larva, reinstated in its pupal chamber, resealed it, and changed to a pinkish pupa. This stage lasted for four weeks, and the adult then emerged. The adult on emergence was straw-coloured, and remained so for five days, then gradually assuming the characteristic colours until on the ninth day it was fully mature.

It is noteworthy that although the wood was kept outdoors in apparently natural conditions this adult was not ready to emerge until 6th August, long after the species is usually found. Two others emerged from other pieces of the wood on their own account in early July, together with a considerable number of *Conopalpus testaceus* Ol. from a rotten part of one piece. *Grynobius excavatus* Kl.* was not present.

Notes and Observations

AMPHIPYRA PYRAMIDEA L. (SENSU AUCT.) CLUSTERING UNDER BARK; WITH A FEW COMPARATIVE REMARKS ON CONCEALMENT, BEHAVIOUR, ETC.—On 30th August 1972, while searching for Coleoptera in a lane at Blackheath, not far behind my former garden, I was much surprised, on lifting a smallish piece of loose bark on the trunk of a moribund elm, when a Copper Underwing quickly emerged from beneath it and almost instantly flew off. From the crevice thus partly exposed there then came forth in rapid succession a series of specimens, one at a time, each immediately taking flight and coming to rest high out of sight in that or nearby trees. I was unprepared for quarry that did not wait to be caught, but concerned to see how long this curious exodus would last; in fact it was over in about ten seconds, during which, as far as I could estimate, seven moths made their escape. Judging by the smallness of the cavity—what little could be seen of it—they must have been quite tightly packed. Another rather odd feature was the presence of many earwigs under the covering bark, which one might have thought disturbing to the moths. The species is somewhat common in the district at light, but whether it is the true *pyramidea* or the lately separated *berbera* Rungs (or conceivably a mixture) I fear I cannot at present say.

Barrett (1899, *Lep. Brit. Isl.*, 5:251) states that *A. pyramidea* is “only found in woods”, and this seems to be the general idea among authors. It is, however, manifestly no longer true; for, as just seen, the moth can be common enough in a built-up suburb where nothing that could be called a wood has existed for very many years (and where other supposedly woodland species such as *Polia nebulosa* Hufn. occur regularly). Further, Barrett (*l.c.*), whilst remarking on its habit of hiding in sheds, and that it probably rests by day in tree-holes or on the undersides of boughs but that evidence is lacking, makes no mention of its clustering under bark; nor do other authors

* Dr. A. Strand has proved that the various supposed European *Grynobius* are but one variable species, *G. planus* F.—A.A.A.